

P 132221Z DEC 89
FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7231
INFO SECDEF WASHDC
DIA WASHDC
USIA WASHDC 8099
USLO CARIBBEAN
USCINCSO QUARRY HTS PM
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 PANAMA 08566

E.O.12356: DECL:OADR
TAGS: PHUM PINR PGOV PREF PREL PM
SUBJECT: OPPOSITION ACTIVIST GIVES ACCOUNT OF
REGIME TORTURE

¶1. SECRET - ENTIRE TEXT.

¶2. SUMMARY. CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT GUSTAVO CEDENO (STRICTLY PROTECT), WAS ARRESTED BY REGIME AUTHORITIES ON DECEMBER 5, DETAINED FOR 21 HOURS, BEATEN, AND QUESTIONED ABOUT A POSSIBLE NEW COUP ATTEMPT. HE WAS FORCED TO SIGN STATEMENTS AGAINST THE CHURCH AND CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PDC) PRESIDENT RICARDO ARIAS CALDERON, AND WAS REPORTEDLY ENLISTED TO SPY ON THE OPPOSITION BEFORE BEING RELEASED. CEDENO HAS SOUGHT REFUGE AT A U.S. MILITARY FACILITY. END SUMMARY.

¶3. CEDENO, A CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC RATY ACTIVIST, MET WITH POLOFF ON DECEMBER 9 TO REPORT HIS ORDEAL AND DISPLAY HIS BRUISES (CEDENO COULD BARELY WALK AND HAS SINCE SOUGHT REFUGE ON A U.S. BASE.) ACCORDING TO CEDENO, ON DEC. 5, TWELVE ARMED MEN TOOK HIM FROM HIS HOME IN PANAMA CITY. HE WAS PLACED IN A CAR WHERE A FRIEND, HECTOR ANTONIO ARROCHA RIVAS, HANDCUFFED AND HOODED, WAS WAITING. IN SPITE OF THE HOOD, CEDENO CLAIMS HE RECOGNIZED ARROCHA. ONE OF THE ARMED MEN SHOVED CEDENO'S HEAD DOWN BETWEEN HIS KNEES. FROM THIS POSITION, CEDENO COULD SEE THAT ARROCHA WAS NOT WEARING SHOES AND HIS FEET WERE BLOODY BECAUSE HIS TOENAILS HAD BEEN PULLED OUT.

¶4. A HOOD WAS THEN PLACED OVER CEDENO'S HEAD. ALTHOUGH HE COULD NOT SEE, HE BELIEVES HE WAS TAKEN TO FDP HEADQUARTERS IN DOWNTOWN PANAMA CITY. THERE HE WAS STRIPPED TO HIS UNDERWEAR, TAPE WAS PLACED OVER HIS EYES, AND HE WAS BEATEN AND INTERROGATED CONTINUALLY FOR 20 HOURS (LARGELY ON THE LOWER BACK, BUTTOCKS AND THIGHS) BY DIFFERENT TEAMS OF MEN USING RUBBER HOSES. AT ONE POINT, A HAMMER WAS USED TO SMASH THE MIDDLE TOE ON BOTH FEET. A DOCTOR WAS PRESENT AND CUT OPEN THE BLOOD BLISTER THAT FORMED ON ONE TOE AND TOLD HIS TORMENTORS THEY COULD NOT HIT THAT TOE ANY LONGER. AT ANOTHER POINT, HE WAS THROWN INTO A TANK OF COLD WATER. TWICE HE LOST CONSCIOUSNESS.

¶5. CEDENO STATED THAT QUESTIONING CENTERED AROUND AN ALLEGED COUP ATTEMPT HIS CAPTORS ASSUMED MIGHT TAKE PLACE IN MID-DECEMBER. CEDENO SAID THAT IN ORDER TO SATISFY HIS INTERROGATORS, HE MADE UP A STORY SAYING THAT SUCH A RUMOR MIGHT HAVE GOTTEN STARTED BECAUSE PEOPLE BELIEVED NORIEGA WAS HAVING TROUBLE PAYING THE FDP.

¶6. CEDENO, WHO ONCE WORKED IN THE NATIONAL INVESTIGATIVE POLICE (DENI) BETWEEN 1968-70, CLAIMED HE WAS ABLE TO RECOGNIZE A NICKNAME USED FOR PANAMA DEFENSE FORCES (FDP) COL. AROSEMENA KING, NOW HEAD OF G-5 (CIVIC AFFAIRS). CEDENO BELIEVES AROSEMENA KING WAS ONE OF THE MEN WHO THREATENED HIM AND TRIED TO ENLIST HIM TO REPORT ON THE OPPOSITION.

¶ 7. CEDENO SAID HE WAS PROMISED HIS RELEASE AND THAT HIS PARENTS AND BROTHER WOULD NOT BE HARMED IF HE WOULD AGREE TO SPY ON THE OPPOSITION. HE CLAIMS HE AGREED AND, TO LEND CREDIBILITY TO HIS PROMISE, BARGAINED FOR AND SECURED A MONTHLY STIPEND OF USDOLS 1,000. (CEDENO SAID HE INFORMED PDC PRESIDENT ARIAS CALDERON OF THIS "ARRANGEMENT".)

¶ 8. BEFORE HIS RELEASE, CEDENO SAID HE WAS REQUIRED TO SIGN A NUMBER OF STATEMENTS. ONE ACCUSED ARIAS CALDERON OF COMPLICITY IN A COUP PLOT. ANOTHER ACCUSED PANAMA CITY'S CATHOLIC ARCHBISHOP MARCOS MCGRATH OF RUNNING AN ILLEGAL PRINTING PRESS IN THE SAME LOCAL CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL.

¶ 9. CEDENO SAID THAT IT WAS HIS IMPRESSION THAT THE G-2 HE HAD KNOWN WHEN HE HAD WORKED AT THE DENI SOME 20 YEARS AGO NO LONGER EXISTED. IN HIS VIEW, THE CURRENT G-2 CONTAINED "DANGEROUS AND STUPID" ELEMENTS.

¶ 10. COMMENT. EXCEPT FOR THE BRUISES ON HIS BODY AND THE DAMAGED TOES, WE HAVE NO WAY OF VERIFYING ALL OF CEDENO'S STATEMENTS. HIS PHYSICAL CONDITION, HOWEVER, AND THE DETAIL WITH WHICH HE WAS ABLE TO DESCRIBE HIS EXPERIENCE PROVIDES ADDED INSIGHT INTO SOME OF THE THINKING AND METHODS OF NORIEGA'S THUGS.

BUSHNELL